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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 000573

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE MOORE, PLEASE PASS TO NSC JEFF HOVENIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2014

TAGS: PREL PGOV LO HU

SUBJECT: LOST IN TRANSLATION: HUNGARIANS PROTEST THE SLOVAK LANGUAGE ACT

REF: BRATISLAVA 320

Classified By: Acting P/E Counselor Jon Martinson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In protest of the recently amended Slovak language law, Hungarian officials are ratcheting up their public diplomacy efforts. Responding first, representatives of all four parliamentary factions signed a joint letter raising issues of discrimination. Following an August 3 meeting with the President, Foreign Minister Balazs announced Hungary's plans to turn to the UN and other international fora this fall to address the issue. The recent Slovak legislation has also accomplished what no Hungarian politician has been able to achieve for at least a decade - unify the political parties in an unprecedented manner. With Hungary currently attempting to stay on the PR "high road," the newly-appointed Slovak Ambassador to Hungry acknowledges that Slovakia has "lost the PR battle." End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Following the passage of the amendment to the 1995 Slovak language law in June (reftel), Hungarian government officials and politicians quickly raised an outcry. On July 20, the four parliamentary faction representatives signed a joint statement requesting that the Slovak Parliament withdraw the act. Interestingly, the Slovak legislation accomplished in the short-term what no politician has been able to do for at least a decade - unify the parliamentary parties. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) led the initiative, with SZDSZ faction leader Janos Koka commenting that the issue is not a bilateral dispute but a serious violation of human rights in Europe. (Comment. With SZDSZ currently struggling to maintain the semblance of a political party, Koka's efforts to coordinate the four-party letter may reflect his effort to maintain his party's leadership role in Parliament following the Party's new President demand that he step down. End comment.)

¶3. (SBU) Following a meeting with President Solyom and Fidesz party Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Zsolt Nemeth on August 3, Foreign Minister Peter Balazs stated during a news conference that Hungary will turn to the UN Human Rights Council and the Council of Europe to seek their respective advisory opinions concerning the Slovak Language Act that Hungary considers discriminatory. President Solyom, going on record in support of Hungarians beyond the borders, expressed clearly that he views the Slovak Language Act as "incompatible with international laws protecting minorities, and with the value system of the European Union." Zsolt Nemeth added that a multi-party parliamentary delegation will visit various European cities, including Brussels and The Hague, to raise the issue in those capitals, adding that "this is not only a Hungarian-Slovak dispute, but one that violates European norms."

¶4. (C) In an initial courtesy call with the Charge, incoming Slovak Ambassador to Hungary Weiss acknowledged that he has definitely had a rough start and is in full defensive mode on the Language Law. Weiss seemed to understand that in Hungary (and possibly Brussels) Slovakia has lost the PR battle.

Ambassador Weiss said in an effort to mitigate the law's consequences, he will be urging his government to be very careful in the implementing regulations to avoid new conflicts. Continuing, he said he understands the need to improve relations with the GOH and he will try to focus on pragmatic cooperation, especially on infrastructure/highway/bridge projects.

¶5. (C) Comment. With most of Hungary on a break from politics during the summer "uborka szezon" the Slovak language law issue provides plenty of media fodder - on both sides of the border. Hungarian press reports on August 5 cited the Slovak Foreign Ministry's labeling of the Hungarian response as "hysteria." While suggesting that President Solyom should have requested a meeting with the full Foreign Affairs Committee on August 3, Matyas Eorsi, Parliamentary Chair of the European Affairs Committee told us on August 4 that he agrees that the best way forward on the language issue is via international organizations. The Prime Minister's new Security and National Security Advisor, David Koranyi, also confirmed in a meeting with the Charge August 3 that planning for a meeting of the two Prime Ministers is on hold, another short-term fall-out of the new language law.

¶6. (U) Embassy Bratislava has coordinated on this cable  
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